(d) if so, Government's response thereto as licenser and the details of the action taken thereon?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (SHRIMATI SUMITRA MAHAJAN): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) The existing licensing provision envisages adequate safeguards.

(c) and (d) The reported advertisement of basic service provider offering mobile services on national roaming basis has been reportedly withdrawn and the matter is *sub-judice*.

Universal Service Obligation levy

2957. SHRI NILOTPAL BASU: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Government are collecting 'Universal Service Obligation' levy from all telecom operators for funding expansion of the telecom operations in the rural areas which are not so remunerative;

(b) if so, whether this levy is accruing to the Consolidated Fund of India; and

(c) if so, the details of the amount collected, so far, and the manner in which this fund is going to be deployed and utilised and other details arising therefrom?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (SHRIMATI SUMITRA MAHAJAN): (a) The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) has recommended apportionment of universal service levy @ 5% of Adjusted Gross Revenue (AGR). This levy is a part of the total license fee to be paid by the various service providers such as Basic, Cellular, National and International Long

Distance, Paging, Infrastructure Provider Category-II, Very Small Aperture Terminal (VSAT). The Universal Service Support Policy, on the recommendations of TRAI, as accepted by the Government, has taken effect from 01.04.2002. Guidelines in this regard have also been issued.

(b) The amount set aside as Universal Service levy have been credited to the Consolidated Fund of India.

(c) An amount of Rs. 1273.73 Crores set aside towards Universal Service Fund (USF) till 28th February, 2003, has ben credited to the Consolidated Fund of India. The guidelines referred to in reply to part (a) of the question govern the deployment and utilization of the USF. The budgetary provision of Rs. 300 Crores allocated for 2002-03 has been utilized for supporting operational expenditure for existing Village Public Telephones (VPTs). Some payments have also been made in respect of the VPTs which have replaced the Multi Access Radio Relay VPTs.

Electricity operated telephones

†2958. SHRI MUNAVVAR HASAN: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that only electricity operated telephones are functioning in the rural areas of various States, particularly, in Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) whether telephones remain out of order in the rural areas in certain States due to lack of any alternative arrangement of power whether power is supplied only for four to eight hours in a day while full rental is charged by the department from the subscribers; and

(d) if so, the details of the steps being taken to streamline functioning of electrically operated telephones in such areas?

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.